

ETIQUETTES OF GRIEF.

There is nothing in which peculiarities and differences of character show themselves more strikingly than in the variety of ways in which people take their griefs. By griefs, we mean those sorrows which are the result of some bereavement. There is no one whose heart is so self-love, that there is not some one object the loss of which would plunge him into the most profound grief. Every one has his tender side, as well as his weak point. Some possess a greater number of interests than others, but every one has something, a husband, a wife, a child, or a friend which occupies his thoughts and care, the presence or loss of which makes life a pleasure or a blank. It is quite true that "the heart knoweth its own bitterness," and that no one can properly estimate the trials of his neighbor, or calculate beforehand how any one will conduct himself under affliction. You cannot argue upon it, nor safely draw any inferences on the subject. It is one of the mysteries of the human heart which no one can solve, and being so, it is unfair as it is narrow-minded to say that this or that person does not feel so strongly as another because his conduct or expression does not tally with certain laws on the matter. It is quite possible to argue both ways on a subject of this kind; but it is not safe to pronounce upon any one as really deficient in feeling because he does not act according to our notions of the way in which we believe that we should ourselves act under similar circumstances. We are not lawyers, and have no right to lay down rules for others in such matters, especially as they are beyond the reach of a law.

then it must be acknowledged that society has no direct and positive claim upon them. It is one of the peculiarities of the most exalted rank, that they who occupy it must, to a certain extent, put a restraint upon their natural desire for privacy. In her gradual approach to her former life, let us deal gently and lovingly with our Queen, as a child would towards a parent, that she may know that we understand and can appreciate the great sacrifice she is making of herself for the public good, and that we are fully sensible that human nature is the same in all—that the stricken heart of both rich and poor alike need repose and time to recover itself.

There is, however, one aspect of this subject—the expression of grief in which we confess to have very little patience. We allude to certain etiquettes which, in many instances, are followed to an absurd extent. There are some persons in the world who cannot exist without making themselves the center of all they do in *en regie*. We have known instances in which when the death of a relation has been announced, for whom the survivors had no feelings but that of dislike, that they think it necessary to shut themselves up in their rooms, as if they were overwhelmed with affliction. They go through the farce of pretending to a sorrow which all the world knows they do not feel. Heirs who never cared for their departed, but who think it necessary to cause the same sorrow and regret as those whose faithfulness, tender care, dutifulness, unselfishness, and uprightness have endeared them to all who have been associated with them, and yet no distinction is made in the same etiquettes are observed, the same retirement from the world, the same expressions, the same language is adopted in both instances. We do not of course, refer to the custom of wearing mourning, which is a rule which is not to be dispensed with; and, so far, etiquette may serve us in good stead, when it prevents our proclaiming too plainly to the world the estimation in which we have held our deceased relatives and friends. It is said that "blood is thicker than water," that ties of relationship bind more strongly than other ties. It may be so where the mutual obligations of relationship are cheerfully fulfilled, but certainly not where those obligations have been neglected, set at naught, and contradicted through life.

"To be wroth with one we love, Doth work madness in the brain;" and ties of relationship are worse than without force, when all the affection, kindness, and consideration which they are supposed to represent, are not only wanting but reversed. Two rather absurd and amusing instances occur to us connected with the subject of etiquettes of grief. One was that of a parish clerk, who was called upon to take part in the funeral obsequies of one of our parish dignitaries. The clergyman, having been somewhat disconcerted by the apparent backwardness of the clerk to make the responses, which, when he did make them, were not in his usual tone and manner, but rather as if he were suffering from a severe cold, inquired, after the service was over, whether he was ill. The clerk both looked and expressed astonishment at being so interrogated. The clergyman explained, and added that he was afraid he was suffering from a severe cold. The clerk instantly drew down the corners of his mouth, and said, in the same smuffling, lachrymose tone, that he was not ill, but that he thought it his duty to appear affected. The other was that of a widow who had recently become a widow. She had not been conspicuous for fidelity or conjugal affection, and when she saw some of her husband's relatives for the first time after his death, and observed or thought she observed them looking at her with disapprobation, her uncovered head, forestalled all remonstrance by saying, with a sigh, that "dear Tom" had made her promise she would not disguise herself by wearing that hideous head-dress called a widow's cap. "Dear Tom," she knew, was not a man to know or trouble himself about any woman's dress when he was alive, and it was not likely that his rest would be disturbed by the thought that his lovely widow might be disgracing herself by wearing the sign of her widowhood.

It continually happens, during a London season, that a whole family is shut out from society by the death of a relative for whom they never cared, and whom some of them never beheld. The rule of etiquette has acted that no one shall mix in society till after a certain time has elapsed after the death of a relative, and a kind of graduated scale has been fixed, varying according to the degrees of relationship. Any infringement of this rule is severely commented upon, and the transgressor is denounced as unfeeling, indecent, heartless, and many other things besides. A mother who has several daughters to dispose of—or perhaps it may be only one, but that one on the approach of a prospect from a most eligible party—is sometimes suddenly shut out from society by an etiquette which demands of her a retirement from the world for a season, on account of the death of a relation for whom none of them ever cared, or had any reason to regret, and she has perhaps to bear, in addition, the uncertainty whether the anxiously expected marriage will ever "come off," the course of true love having been interrupted at a critical moment. Expenses might be multiplied *ad infinitum*, exposing both the inconveniences and absurdities which result from a compliance with the rigorous laws of etiquette. There are people who think it indecorous, at such times, to meet the different members of their family at dinner, but manage to get over their grief at tea time, and have little coteries in their bed-room or sitting-room; or who think it honoring the dead to darken one of their windows for a twelve-month with a huge quantity of mourning, and who consider it an act of respect to have their carriages and private carriages, indispensable appendages of grief. The custom of people sending their private carriages closed, as their representatives, to follow the funeral, is certainly one of the strangest improprieties. In fact, all funerals in this country have a somewhat pagan aspect, owing to the power of etiquette, which has prescribed what shall or shall not be done, and which scarcely any one dares to resist. When the heart is bowed down with grief, and silently pleads to be let alone, the undertaker has it all his own way, and hatbands and scarfs of silk and crape swell the amount of his bill, and help to make the solemn ceremony a profit to himself. The clerk gets another breadth for his wife's Sunday gown, and the clergyman's wife or daughter a new silk apron.

The tradesman complies with etiquette, and puts up a shutter in honor of a deceased patron, which also serves as an advertisement to the living, and conciliates the survivors. After the lapse of a certain time, during which the relative mourns, or are supposed to mourn, in private, in retirement, calls of thanks for kind inquiries are sent out, which are meant to express that the mourners are well disposed to other people to share their own. In short, from first to last, etiquette has prescribed a series of definitions, all the minute of the symbols and expressions of grief; so much so that an amusing anecdote has been told, perhaps more than once, of a lady who went to one of the great mourning warehouses in London, and, on mentioning what she required, was politely questioned by one of the shopmen to go further on. "This, madame, is the light affliction department; the heavy bereavement is further on." The result of all this system of etiquettes is, that, while invidiousness may be avoided, there is a considerable amount of unreality underlying the whole question. A combination of friends and relations of infinite value; a blessing to be prized, and to be bewailed when lost; but it is possible to have a friend whose love, like Jonathan's for David, surpassed the love of women; or a daughter-in-law like Ruth, whose love and loyalty were not less true to her mother-in-law, "Where thou goest I will go; where thou dost I will die, and there will I be buried. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." No outward expressions of grief can ever sufficiently represent the sorrow which their loss must occasion those who are called upon to bear it, and who are properly sensible of it. It is upon a deep and overwhelming sorrow comes upon us, that all minor considerations are lost sight of. The heart that is really stricken has neither inclination nor time to dwell upon the host of little things which occupy those whose griefs are only skin-deep.—London Society.

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